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In "Sarah Orne Jewett: New England Pastoralist"

I have tried to demonstrate that an old tradition may be used to understand modern fiction, that the pastoral elements in Jewett must be reckoned with if one is to appreciate fully her best work, and that the pastoral elements account for her high reputation as a local colorist.

William Empson's instructive discussion of the genre in Some Versions of Pastoral was useful, but this paper depends more on the traditional view of pastoral, as expressed by W. W. Greg and L. K. Chambers, which defines the genre in terms of country life. Chapter II examines Miss Jewett's rural background among the fisher-farmer folk she knew as a child and also examines her reading habits. Chapter III analyzes Deephaven, A Country Doctor, and A Marsh Island and points out how thoroughly they are permeated with pastoral assumptions. And the fourth chapter analyzes in detail Miss Jewett's acknowledged masterpiece, The Country of the Pointed Firs, and shows how her success depends more on pastoral assumptions than on local color. Finally, Sarah Orne Jewett is placed in the main stream of American literature by revealing the similarities between the pastoral theme of innocence and the Adamic myth of innocence which informs classic American literature.

SARAH ORNE JEWETT: NEW ENGLAND PASTORALIST

by

Terry A. Babb

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The term "pastoral" has moved a long way from the shepherds and flutes it once indicated. Most responsible for this change was William Empson, who in 1938¹ applied the term to such diverse (and fieldless, flockless, fluteless) works as Shakespeare's martial Troilus and Cressida and Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. He did this by expanding the traditional definition--a treatment of shepherds and rustic life--to that technique of putting the complex into the simple, a definition broad enough to include not only representatives of the simple life, upon whose roughly clothed backs traditional poets placed the heavy burden of their own interests and values as men of the court or at least of the world, but also Shakespeare's intricately related parallel plots and Alice's underground confrontation with rabbits and the Queen of Diamonds in an elaborate allegory of politics and Freudian psychology.

If this application of pastoral seems too general, making the shoe fit every foot, and if it takes away from the pastoral too many characteristics inherent in its

¹See William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (New York, 1938).

historically established definition, it nevertheless does open up a new approach to many works which can best be explained in this light. Four of Sarah Orne Jewett's five novels--A Country Doctor, A Marsh Island, Deephaven, and The Country of the Pointed Firs--receive this approach well, for not only does her miniature world with its self-contained, simple but wise, people constitute the simple which contains the complex, but also in the author's attitude and handling of the bulk of her work there runs the spirit of what I must call the true pastoral--that verse of simple life which sprang from the idylls of Theocritus in the third century before Christ and eventually made its way, changed in scenery but little in convention, to English countrysides and the pens of English poets.

It is instructive to compare a well-known scholar's definition of "pastoral" with a Jewett expert's assessment of what is most characteristic of Sarah Orne Jewett's work. John Lynen, author of The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost, writes that pastoral

. . . is always the product of a very highly developed society and arises from the impulse to look back with yearning and a degree of nostalgia toward the simpler, purer life which such society has left behind.²

One is struck by the similarity of this definition to

²John F. Lynen, The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost (New Haven, 1960), p. 12.

Richard Cary's opinion that:

An unquenchable urge for things-as-they-were, for the older, golden days of simplicity and serenity, informs the great bulk of her [SOJ's] work.³

Another Jewett assessment by Cary--"What she wishes to call attention to, of course, is the presence of the universal in the particular"⁴--sounds very much like William Empson's "putting the complex into the simple," and of course it is a necessary pastoral requirement that the miniature rural world acts as a metaphor of the larger urban world.

People familiar with the work of Sarah Orne Jewett will not be surprised to have her named as a pastoralist. While she was still living, James Russell Lowell said as much in a letter to her London publisher:

Nothing more pleasingly characteristic of rural life in New England has been written. . . . They are probably idylls in prose and the life they commemorate is as simple in its main elements, if not so picturesque in its setting, as that which has survived for us in Theocritus.⁵

Among Miss Jewett's gallery of famous friends there were others who noticed and appreciated the pastoral quality

³Richard Cary, Sarah Orne Jewett (New York, 1962), p. 19.

⁴Ibid., p. 35.

⁵Francis Otto Matthiessen, Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1929), p. 89.

of her work, notably John Greenleaf Whittier, who spoke of Deephaven as "so simple, pure, and so true,"⁶ and William James, who found in her work "that incommunicable cleanness of the salt air when one first leaves town."⁷ Unfortunately, no one has taken these suggestions seriously; it is much easier simply to group her with the local colorists. This neglect of what is pastoral in Jewett has contributed to the lack of careful critical evaluation of her work. This is not to say that Miss Jewett does not have her staunch supporters; she has, but the general reading public outside New England have read little more than one short story in their high school American literature course.

The random comments of Lowell and Whittier will be taken seriously in this study, the purpose of which is to examine systematically the pastoral elements in the novels of Sarah Orne Jewett.

Although William Empson is to be congratulated for demonstrating that the conventions of the pastoral--the singing match, the youth-age debate (representing the spirits of the present and the past), the death of shepherd-poet lamented by his heir, the unhappy shepherd, the fair shepherdess, oaten pipe, wandering flock, and

⁶Sarah Orne Jewett Letters, ed. Richard Cary (Maine, 1956), p. 11. Hereinafter referred to as Jewett Letters.

⁷Matthiessen, p. 101.

others--are not necessary to its power, and for demonstrating also the adaptability of an old tradition, there is a very real danger that in his treatment of the pastoral the term has been expanded beyond meaningfulness. Empson emphasizes the pastoral's ability to reconcile conflicts between the upper and lower classes. The pastoral puts the language of the educated classes into the mouths of peasants, bringing them together in such a way as to make them think better of each other. This interesting notion allows Empson to apply his definition of pastoral to works of art which are not concerned with rural life--the Beggars' Opera, for instance.

I am convinced that John Lynen has touched the heart of the matter in his statement "that class relationships are not so important to the genre as the need individuals have felt to measure their complex society by the standards of a simple one."⁸ This is not to denigrate Mr. Empson's interesting work but simply to insist upon what is perhaps the key pastoral assumption of this paper. What is nearest to the pulse of the old pastoral and remains nearest to our understanding of the term today is the preoccupation of the genre with rural life. When a disgruntled sophisticate assumes the role of country dweller and expresses his dissatisfaction with the

⁸Lynen, p. xi.

fragmentation of city life by contrasting his condition with rural man's serene and simple existence, we have the most vital version of pastoral. W. W. Greg recognized this thirty-two years before Empson emphasized it in

Some Versions of Pastoral:

The earliest pastoral poetry . . . was directly born of the contrast between the recollections of a childhood spent among the Sicilian uplands and the crowded social and intellectual city-life of Alexandria.⁹

The true nature of pastoral rests in a set of assumptions which cohere to form what might be called the myth of country life. When this myth is operative, there results a body of literature about the simple folk. The myth of the country, however, is seldom actually shared by country people. While the pastoral is certainly about them, it is neither for them nor by them.¹⁰ The pastoral is the sophisticate's mock-escape plan for evading his complicated city routine, and it takes the form of longing for the good old days of simplicity and serenity--before Caesar's death, perhaps, or before "Jefferson's folly," depending on whether the poet is Virgil or Sarah Orne Jewett. In either case it is an escape to a simple, ordered existence. This has a tendency to make the pastoral artificial, for the pastoral always requires a spokesman,

⁹W. W. Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama (London, 1906), p. 5.

¹⁰Empson, p. 6.

traditionally a shepherd-poet, to sing the virtues of the simple life, and this spokesman pretends to be what he obviously is not--a rustic. Nevertheless, the sophisticate in rustic garb is prerequisite, as one must know what one is escaping from, and only a sophisticate can fully appreciate the dream of country life.

And yet, though no serious swain would admit it, the escape to Arcadia is not the major thing; it is not an end in itself. The pastoralist runs away from the city and insists on tranquillity and serenity, but for all that his greatest desire is to address his peers. He seeks a point of vantage from which to express his ideas about life, and especially about other sophisticated people. "You can say everything about complex people," according to William Empson, "by a complete consideration of simple people."¹¹ If the subject matter of pastoral is country life and the purpose of pastoral is to say something about the whole world which includes the city and the city dweller, then the everyday happenings of the swain have to carry added meanings. This reasoning is substantiated by W. W. Greg, who states:

At no stage in its development does literature concern itself with the obvious, with the bare scaffolding of life. Whenever we find an author interested in the circle of prime necessity,

¹¹Ibid., p. 137.

we may be sure that he himself stands outside it.¹²

In order for the pastoralist's image of country life to have broad appeal and to be meaningful, it must be an image of all levels of society.¹³ The old pastoral achieved this easily through the character of the shepherd-poet. Daphnis was likened to the king in that he was the leader of his flock; he was like the courtier when he played the lover to Acrotime; he was philosopher and politician in his debates and singing matches with other shepherds; he was plain peasant when he tended his flock--hence the necessity for creating a miniature world which is felt by the cultured to be complete. In this way the little world reflects the whole world. Under this condition, when the swain expresses humble, sincere emotions in the language of the court--whether Elizabeth's or Oliver Wendell Holmes's--there results a greater feeling of brotherhood between the high and the lowly. According to William Empson, this is

The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between the rich and poor and was intended to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way). From seeing the two sorts of people combined

¹²Greg, p. 4.

¹³Lynen, p. 16.

like this you thought better of both; the best parts of both were used.¹⁴

The invitation to urbanites that the pastoral offers is illustrated in the following stanza from "The Pasture," which, significantly, begins every collection of Robert Frost's poems:

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long.--You come too.¹⁵

This invitation is special.¹⁶ It invites the reader to visit a special world that is slow-moving and certain. From this special world one is able to achieve fundamental insights which help one to live his life more meaningfully when the excursion is over and one must return to the city. What is asked of us is that we assume a rustic point of view which will help to get beneath the complexities of our social matrix. The invitation is only temporary; the urbanite is not asked to abandon the city once and for all; the city has value, too. The poet, however, expresses a mistrust of the great world that his audience shares.¹⁷ It is on this common ground that pastoral makes

¹⁴Empson, p. 11.

¹⁵Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 1.

¹⁶The next few pages are indebted to Lynen's work.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 10.

its stand. "And this, the reaction against the world that is too much with us," W. W. Greg said in 1906, "is, after all, the keynote of what is most intimately associated with the name of pastoral in literature."¹⁸ Perhaps this is the reason for the long run pastoral has had. The pastoral impulse is a human impulse, and the only time we do not hear the pastoral song is when scientific advances have rubbed our noses in the real manure of the real rustic scene. Under the merciless eye of science the myth of country life appears too unlikely for anyone to take it seriously. Little wonder, then, that the pastoral tends to idealize the rural world. It sometimes rains in Arcadia, but there is scarcely any mud, for "pastoral's . . . highest function," E. K. Chambers reminds us, "is to paint an imaginary and not a real world."¹⁹

Sophisticated people willingly accept the first condition of pastoral, which insists upon the existence of an idealistic distinction between the complex urban life and the idyllic, peaceful country life. At home in this city-country contrast is the assumption that natural man, the simple man, is purer than cultivated man and that there exists between him and nature a special sympathy. Somehow the country man has been able to acquire wisdom

¹⁸Greg, p. 6.

¹⁹E. K. Chambers, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Some Collected Studies (New York, 1965), p. 169.

of a fundamental and natural sort without losing his innocence, as invariably happens in the city. That the city corrupts is the implication. City life is unnatural and artificial; the real truth about a region can only be found in its rural life. "Since rural man earns his living from the soil," observes John Lynen, "he is independent of the complicated social structure of the urban world."²⁰

The educated urbanite is usually ready to accept the prime pastoral assumptions mentioned above. We know that they were accepted in Theocritus' Alexandria and in Virgil's Rome and, too, in Spenser's London. Without these assumptions there is no pastoral.

²⁰Lynen, p. 11.

CHAPTER II

MOTIVES FOR PASTORAL: FAMILY PAST, FRIENDS, READING, LITERARY THEORY

One of the chief characteristics of pastoral, to which Theocritus himself lends authority, is that the pastoral song springs from a weariness and dissatisfaction with the present and, simultaneously, a longing for a former period of quiet happiness and untroubled security. The productions of a lifetime of writing by Sarah Orne Jewett depend on just such a present-past conflict.

Born when she was, September 3, 1849, and reared as she was by granduncles and grandaunts, Sarah Jewett could not have avoided, even had she wanted to, assimilating the flavor of a rapidly ebbing epoch in New England history before it altogether vanished. It was inevitable that a large part of her reality was manufactured of stories about the past--and such a past as few children are heir to. It was a story-book past of high adventure on both sides of land--a time of heroes, not the least of whom was Theodore Furber Jewett, paternal grandfather of Sarah Orne Jewett, of late the largest merchant in South Berwick, Maine, and owner of that hamlet's finest house. Theodore F. Jewett moved his family to South Berwick and bought

the old Haggens Mansion ten years before Sarah was born.¹ The "great house," as it was called, was built by John Haggens in 1774. When Sarah was a child, she heard her grandfather tell how it took three ship's carpenters one hundred days to complete the entrance hall and staircase.

When Sarah visited her grandfather Jewett's store, the present melted into the past. The unsavory textile mill built one mile below the Jewett house on the Salmon Falls River disappeared in a cloud of nostalgia. Such exciting stories the girl heard, and such interesting storytellers--all retired sea captains who had been to far-off places and had brought back tokens of their travels --jars of olives, perhaps, or bags of Cuban oranges. She heard them talk of terrifying Atlantic storms and "good bargains in Havana, or Barbados, or Havre."²

Sarah Jewett had an aversion to formal schooling, but she learned her lessons well on trips with her father. She came to know many of his patients on lonely farms and in fishermen's cottages, and she never forgot them. The "doctor's girl," as they called her, would wait either in the carriage or sometimes in the kitchen, where she

¹John Eldridge Frost, Sarah Orne Jewett (Kittery Point, Maine, 1960), p. 2.

²Francis Otto Matthiessen, Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1929), p. 28.

ate the piece of gingerbread baked just for her. She enjoyed these calls at lonely country houses, and she remembered the people and their life histories and their interests and the stories they told. She learned what brought them grief and what made them laugh:

The quiet village life, the dull routine of farming or mill life, early became interesting to me. I was taught to find everything that an imaginative child could ask, in the simple scenes close at hand.³

The passing of this secure round of self-sufficiency was forever grieved by Sarah Jewett. For her the past constantly impinged on the present. She enjoyed living among people who admired her doctor-father and who made much of his little girl in her solitary treks across the barren countryside. It was entirely reassuring to grow up among old folks who remembered the high achievement of her grandfather Jewett. At that time there were people alive who could still gauge the quality of his success. When this time passed, Sarah Orne Jewett sorrowed for it. In a letter to John G. Whittier, who had identical notions about rural life, she wrote:

. . . nobody has mourned more than I over the forsaken farmhouses which I see everywhere as I drive about the country out of which I grew, and where every bush and tree seem like my cousins.⁴

The city-country contrast informs all of Miss Jewett's

³Frost, p. 23.

⁴Matthiessen, p. 22.

important work. She came to believe that "the real drama of life" was to be found in "a dull little country village." In the city "only the glaring virtues and strident vices" became apparent. "The delicate cadences are lost in the blare of heavy tones."⁵ Ideas such as this one pervade Miss Jewett's work. In A Country Doctor, Dr. Ferris, drawn from her father, fusses over the popular notion that life in rural New England is "prosaic." The narrator of "Law Lane," a short story, insists that the comedies and tragedies of life are performed as much by country people in homespun clothes as by city folk in velvet and lace. In "Betty Leicester," a children's story, the young heroine cries out, "Why, Papa Dear, I do believe that there is one person in Tideshead of every kind in the world." Here the writer comments upon the similarity beneath the surface differences that city and country people share.

The decay of rural areas in Sarah Orne Jewett's world is a direct result of economic innovations in the city. The country is a receptacle of all that is good in the past; the city, all that is repugnant in the present.⁶ Miss Jewett seems to assign virtue to the country; vice to the city. Deephaven, A Country Doctor, A Marsh Island, and The Country of the Pointed Firs hymn the supremacy of the past over

⁵Richard Cary, Sarah Orne Jewett (New York, 1962), p. 41.

⁶Ibid., p. 44.

the present, the rural over the urban.

The effect of the Jewett family past--and in a larger sense the history of pre-industrial New England--on Sarah Jewett is recorded throughout her work, but nowhere more directly and more unadorned than in the preface to the 1893 edition of Deephaven, her first book. The young author of Deephaven was "possessed by a dark fear that townspeople and country people would never understand one another."⁷ Sarah Orne Jewett had thus found her raison d'etre with her first book, and this became the dominant theme of all her work with the exception of The Tory Lover, her least distinguished book.

Sarah Orne Jewett wanted "to explain the past and the present to each other,"⁸ and, if possible, to reconcile the new to the old. She believed reconciliation could be achieved by drawing rural characters as they really were, to stress their universality rather than their eccentricities. That she was aware of the local-color school of fiction prevalent in the latter half of the nineteenth century there can be no doubt. But Sarah Jewett was not a local colorist, declares Richard Cary--perhaps her most thorough contemporary interpreter.⁹ The tendency of the genre was "to stress the special, the quaint, the primitive, and the idiosyncratic

⁷(Boston, 1877), p. 3.

⁹Cary, p. 18.

⁸Ibid., p. 8.

at the expense of the common."¹⁰ Exaggeration in landscape, character, dialect, and manners was the rule of the regionalists, with emphasis on uniqueness.¹¹ Miss Jewett numbers among her gallery of characters some extraordinary eccentrics, but her main characters have a strong streak of the universal.¹² Mary Wilkins Freeman, the leading practitioner of local-color in New England, wrote Miss Jewett the following note: "I never wrote any story equal to your 'White Huron.' I don't think I ever read a story unless I except Tolstoy's 'Two Deaths' that so appealed to me."¹³ Matthiessen suggests that the reason for Miss Jewett's superiority is her possession of "an inevitability Miss Wilkins never attained"¹⁴ and that Miss Wilkins was never able to establish atmosphere in any story with the completeness of Sarah Orne Jewett's best work. Miss Jewett avoided the thin particularization found in most local-color stories and concentrated her force on the underlying streak of universality.¹⁵ Indeed, she expressed in her preface to Deephaven a "desire to make some sort of explanation to those who still expected to find the caricatured yankee of fiction, striped trousers, bell-crowned hat, and all."¹⁶ Theodore Herman Jewett taught

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Matthiessen, p. 84.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cary, p. 27.

¹⁶ Deephaven, p. 4.

his daughter many things other than her appreciation and understanding of nature. Through him she received her first knowledge of books. As if suspecting the life she would lead, Dr. Jewett gave Sarah some good advice: "Great writers don't try to write about people and things, they tell them just as they are."¹⁷ He tried to interest her in Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy, but Sarah was more at home with Pride and Prejudice and Cranford.

The books one reads are usually a good index into the character of the reader. Sarah Orne Jewett read widely in the best that has been thought and said, but she had her favorites which she read over and over again and about which she wrote many enthusiastic letters. She had particular affection for Sterne's Sentimental Journey, White's Selborne, Tennyson's Ballad of the Revenge, Arnold's Scholar Gypsy, and Lowell's Biglow Papers. Her two favorite short story writers were Kipling and Henry James, two writers who often complimented Miss Jewett's work. Arnold's essay on George Sand brought tears to her eyes, and she stayed up half the night reading Anna Karenina (she felt a kinship to Tolstoy).

In a letter to Annie Fields, Miss Jewett revealed that she occasionally read works radically opposed to her sense of propriety. On this occasion she was vexed with

¹⁷Matthiessen, p. 14.

Clarissa Harlowe. She found it more unpleasant than Zola even. She defended Zola on didactic grounds. Reading Zola made the reader a better person, according to Miss Jewett--not so Clarissa Harlowe, which "fooled her mind in a way that naughty books of the French sort never do."¹⁸ Still she valued Richardson's book for its influence on literary tradition.

It does not seem that Miss Jewett thought of Madame Bovary as a "naughty book of the French sort"; she liked it too well. Her comments to Annie Fields revealed something of her literary theory as well as her admiration:

I read Madame Bovary all last evening. It is quite wonderful how great a book Flaubert makes of it. People talk about dwelling upon trivialities [sic] and commonplaces in life, but a master writer gives everything weight, and makes you feel the distinction and importance of it. . . . That is one reason why writing about simple country people takes my time and thought . . . the woes of Hamlet absorb our thoughts no more than the silly wavering gait of this Madame Bovary
(Letters, pp. 81-82)

It seems fairly obvious and not surprising that Miss Jewett's affection for a literary work increased according to its similarity to her own work. Speaking in 1906 of The Life of Catherine Sedgwick in a letter to Sara Norton, she wrote, "There is a page, too, about the advantages of country life, that made me 'fire up' about

¹⁸Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett, Annie Fields (Boston, 1911), p. 90. Hereinafter referred to as Letters.

Berwick as I used in my best days" (Letters, p. 219). It is easy to see why Miss Jewett liked "The Deserted Village," and why she could not get enough of William Wordsworth's "The Leech Gatherer," and why Dorothy Wordsworth's Tour of Scotland brought forth still greater admiration. She wrote to Annie Fields, "It is just our book and the way we enjoy things isn't it, when we are footing it out of doors" (Letters, p. 44). Another Englishman, William Makepeace Thackeray, was a great favorite of Miss Jewett. She read Pendennis with "such pleasure," and she wrote to Annie Fields that it was a beautiful story. As were most of her favorite books, this one was appreciated for its humanity--"the knowledge of life and the sympathy with everyday troubles" (Letters, p. 42). But it was Thackeray's Vanity Fair for which she reserved her most extravagant praise. She thought it was Tolstoy, Zola, Daudet, Howells, Twain, and Turgenieff all rolled into one (Letters, p. 55). Vanity Fair was "so wise and great" and "realistic and full of splendid scorn for meanness and wickedness" (Letters, p. 55). Jane Austen was also a favorite. It pleased her to realize that the people in Miss Austin's novels were like the ones in old Berwick when she was a child.

There is no other book that can match Harriet Beecher Stowe's The Pearl of Orr's Island for direct and lasting influence on Sarah Orne Jewett, who read it for the first

time when she was thirteen or fourteen. Mrs. Stowe's book is about people who live around decaying, shipless Maine harbors. Miss Jewett wrote several letters that attest to the book's influence on her own work. One (to F. M. Hopkins on the occasion of the second printing of Deephaven) admits conscious efforts to imitate Mrs. Stowe in "those delightful early chapters of The Pearl of Orr's Island in writing about people of rustic life just as they were" (Jewett Letters, p. 65). Further along in the letter Miss Jewett insists that this is, after all, the "most interesting subject." She liked this book so well that she felt compelled to say something about it every time she read it, but that did not keep her from noticing its shortcomings. After reading it again for the first time in ten years, she wrote to Annie Fields, "Alas, that she [Stowe] couldn't finish it in the same noble key of simplicity and harmony" (Letters, p. 47).

Harriet Beecher Stowe's story of shore life inspired Sarah Orne Jewett to write her first story about her own locale--"The Shore House." She sent this little sketch to Howells, then editor of the Atlantic Monthly. He refused to publish it right away, not because he did not like it but because he liked it too well. Howells insisted that "The Shore House" was so good that Miss Jewett should do much more with it. Horace Scudder, another editor, adviser, and friend of Miss Jewett, agreed with Howells. With their

persistent encouragement Miss Jewett effected a sea change which turned "The Shore House" into her first book, Deephaven.

Everyone, apparently, liked Sarah Orne Jewett. Few people of talent have provoked so little resentment or envy in their own time. Her friends included the most urbane and talented people in the literary world--not excluding Europe (but excluding the two mightiest, Whitman and Melville, with neither of whom she could have formed a compatible relationship). At Annie Fields' home in Boston Miss Jewett made lasting friendships with Lowell, Holmes, Aldrich, Whittier, James K. Whipple, William and Henry James, and many others less well known. It would appear that so eminent a gallery of companions would have a definite influence on Miss Jewett's work. The young writer of Deephaven admired Howells greatly and wished to write as he wrote, and she diligently applied herself to his every suggestion. But it appears, nonetheless, that Sarah Jewett was on an unalterable course from the beginning. Her brilliant and uncritical (with reference to Miss Jewett) friends spoke often of her work, and this must have affected her somehow, yet it is difficult to imagine her writing any other way than she did. If The Tory Lover is an example of a trend in her writing, it shows that Miss Jewett's best path lay in the direction of Dunnet Landing, and not historical fiction. She

insisted on the superiority of the country and her sophisticated friends went along with her.

Rudyard Kipling, whom Sarah Orne Jewett believed to be far ahead of other writers of prose, was extravagant enough to say that it was worth spending three winters in New England just to be able to distill the full flavor from Miss Jewett's stories. Henry James, who offered to write an appreciative preface to Annie Fields' collection of the Jewett letters in 1911, declared that Sarah Jewett was a "mistress of fiction all her own."¹⁹ After Deephaven Miss Jewett rarely received advice. Before that event her editors were free with their criticisms. Once in 1868 the Atlantic refused one of her stories, "Uncle Peter's tragedy." The editor who rejected this story advised Miss Jewett to use young ladies as her chief characters.²⁰ This advice, probably written by Howells, was thereafter unerringly followed by her, but it is unlikely that she would have failed to find out eventually where her strength lay. Horace Scudder, the editor of the Riverside Magazine for children, advised her not to write too much or to grow careless.²¹ These two editors, Howells and Scudder, knew her work from the first and expected her best.

During her lifetime Sarah Orne Jewett got along well

¹⁹Cary, p. 29.

²¹Matthiessen, p. 42.

²⁰Frost, p. 41.

with every editor of the Atlantic Monthly, but her relationship with Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who succeeded Howells, was especially warm. She paid him the compliment of sincere appreciation for his own literary efforts. She was "deeply moved" by Aldrich's poetry and grateful for his criticism of her work. He had, she said, "helped her to keep toward a better direction than she could have found for herself." Aldrich in return was both charming and extravagant regarding Miss Jewett. He was charming when he told her that whenever he received one of her "perfect little stories, the whole number seemed to bloom,"²² and he was extravagant when he wrote to her, "I believe, for example, that Hawthorne's pallid allegories will have faded away long before those two little Dulham ladies."²³ (Skeptics point out that it was this same Aldrich who called Whitman a bore and predicted future generations would ignore him.)

Annie Fields, wife of James T. Fields, editor and publisher of the Atlantic Monthly, was Sarah Orne Jewett's closest friend. After the death of Mr. Fields in 1881, one was seldom seen without the other. They divided their winters between the Fields' house at 143 Charles Street in Boston and the Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida. Summers were spent at Thunderbolt Hill, Annie Fields' beach house at Manchester-by-Sea. The two friends

²²Ibid., p. 74.

²³Cary, p. 49.

shared their most intimate perceptions. In Sarah Orne Jewett's letters to Annie Fields she reveals her devotion for the old days: "I wish you knew some of the village people--not the new ones, but those to whom in their early days Berwick was the round world itself" (Letters, p. 103). And again on the occasion of the death of a tame bird, she wrote, "It was one of the dear links with those old days" (Letters, p. 103). It was also in her correspondence with her friend that Miss Jewett most clearly, outside her fiction, expressed that world-weariness that is so necessary to the pastoral:

Sometimes the business part of writing grows very noxious to me, and I wonder if in heaven our best thoughts--poet's thoughts, especially --will not be flowers, somehow, or some sort of beautiful live things that stand about and grow and don't have to be chaffered over and bought and sold. It seems as bad as selling our fellow beings . . . , and is another thing to make us wish to fly away and be at rest. (Letters, pp. 62-63)

Many of Miss Jewett's letters indicate that, consciously or unconsciously, she was trying to impress her point of view about country life on her sophisticated Boston friends. She wrote to a friend after the publication of Deephaven:

Berwick itself is growing and flourishing in a way that breaks my heart, but out from the village among the hills and near the sea, there are still the quietest farms--and the people would delight your heart. (Jewett Letters, p. 32)

On another occasion she issued the pastoral invitation to Mrs. Henry Parkman: "I think this great place would amuse you sometime--perhaps we could forsake the world together for a week" (Letters, p. 190). And again in a letter to Sara Norton, daughter of Charles Eliot Norton and niece of James Russell Lowell, Miss Jewett made manifest the city-country conflict so essential to pastoral:

One loves a bit of real country--It is so much more exciting to know a new piece of country than to go to a new large town. . . . There are electric cars in Exeter now, but they can't make the least difference to me! (Letters, p.147)

The ordinary short story with its plot and characters which led to something posed a formidable problem for Sarah Jewett. The plea of Horace Scudder for "a more positive story"²⁴ was echoed by other editors throughout Miss Jewett's lifetime, but it never affected her work. Early in her career she recognized that she couldn't write a "good big Harper's story," preferring, out of necessity perhaps, "to nibble all round her stories like a mouse."²⁵ A letter to Horace Scudder dated July 13, 1873, revealed that Miss Jewett knew herself very well and that she had already pinpointed her weakness:

I don't believe I could write a long story as he [Howells] suggested; and you advise me in this last letter. In the first place I have no dramatic talent. The story would have no

²⁴Ibid., p. 89.

²⁵Ibid., p. 88.

plot. I should have to fill it out with descriptions of character and meditations. It seems to me I can furnish the theatre, and show you the actors and the scenery, and the audience, but there never is any play! (Jewett Letters, p. 28)

Miss Jewett called herself a romantic realist.

In the absence of a formulated theory, it is less than crystal clear as to what she meant exactly. A story was merely "the thing that teases the mind over and over for years and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper--whether little or great, it belongs to literature."²⁶

She looked upon the writer as the possessor of a divine gift, changing the possessor into something like a funnel, into one end of which the variegated experiences of life were channeled; inside the funnel the experiences gathered shape and flavor and when they came out the other end they were fully realized stories. At times she was awed by the gift. She wrote to Annie Fields:

Good Heavens! What a wonderful kind of chemistry it is that evolves all the details of a story and writes them presently in one flash of time! For two weeks I have been noticing a certain string of things and having hints of character, etc., and day before yesterday the plan of the story comes into my mind, and in half an hour I have put all the little words and ways into their places and can read it off to myself like print. Who does it? For I grow more and more sure that I don't! (Letters, p. 51)

Miss Jewett insisted to Scudder that she was not conceited

²⁶Matthiessen, p. 103.

about the "great gift God has given me."²⁷ She said further that she was frightened by it all. To her, writing was a mysterious process: "We come to our work by strange paths--we hardly know how."²⁸ Then, too, she believed that some stories got written in spite of the author but that she did not have the vocabulary to discuss this process; it was simply "that something which does itself."²⁹ This way of writing a story depended on key insight more than on persistent effort. Miss Jewett operated this way because she believed that she "gained her best effect quickly."³⁰ In a letter to Scudder on one story she wrote, "I have been working over it too long which always seems a pity, or rather makes the story itself a pity" (Jewett Letters, p. 171).

Although Sarah Orne Jewett could not explain the process by which she wrote her stories, she did have fairly clear ideas as to why she wrote them. From the start she meant to protect the country from the misconceptions of outsiders. It seemed outrageous to her for two city ladies to mistake a Berwick alderman for a tramp simply because he was walking across an open field in his shirt sleeves. The urban tendency to poke fun at certain peculiarities of country people "fired [her] with indignation," she said.

²⁷Cary, p. 59.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Matthiessen, p. 87.

She committed herself to teaching the world that country people were not ignorant or awkward. "I wanted the world to know their grand, simple lives; and, so far as I had a mission, when I first began to write, I think that was it."³¹ Later, an older Miss Jewett explained her purpose in a positive way:

. . . there is a saying of Plato's that the best thing one can do for the people of a state is to make them acquainted with each other, and it was some instinctive feeling of this sort which led me to wish that the town and country people were less suspicious of one another. (Jewett Letters, p. 64)

Given her motivation for writing, Sarah Orne Jewett's nostalgia for the departed days of Berwick's glory was to be expected. She never was reconciled to the dreary textile mills which replaced the nobler shipbuilding yards. Scattered passages throughout her work press the thesis that the country is at least as important as the city. Speaking of small country towns in "A Late Supper," Miss Jewett inserts:

Life is as important and exciting there as it is anywhere; and it is like every other town, a miniature world, with its great people and small people, bad people and good people, its jealousy and rivalry, kindness and patient heroism.³²

In "A Landless Farmer" Miss Jewett presses the same thesis,

³¹Cary, p. 23.

³²Ibid., p. 34.

but in a more literary context:

Heaven only knows the story of the lives that the gray old New England farmhouses have sheltered and hidden away from curious eyes as best they might. Stronger dramas than have ever been written belong to the dull-looking, quiet homes, that have seen generation after generation live and die. On the well-worn boards of these provincial theatres the great plays of life, the comedies and tragedies, with their lovers and conspirators and clowns; their Juliets and Ophelias, Shylocks and King Lear, are acted over and over and over again.³³

True to her father's advice that great writers do not write about people and things but write them just as they are, Sarah Orne Jewett records the seemingly insignificant, quiet round of routine happenings. Her characters are common people "moving through inexorable cycles of birth, work and death with the dignity of figures cut in an ancient frieze."³⁴ She refuses to exaggerate their failures and successes. "When all is said, she has brought into being a construct as peculiarly her own as Hardy's Wessex, Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford, or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpa."³⁵

³³Ibid., p. 35.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE EVOLUTION OF PASTORAL TECHNIQUE

In addition to The Country of the Pointed Firs, Sarah Orne Jewett wrote three novels about country life. Deephaven, A Country Doctor, and A Marsh Island reveal a progression which may be seen as the evolution of pastoral technique.

Willa Cather has correctly called Miss Jewett's first novel, Deephaven, "a beginning raw work." Deephaven does, nonetheless, contain the seeds of all that is to blossom in the writer's later novels and is therefore instructive. In fact, when we examine her masterpiece, written twenty years later, we are struck by the similarity of the materials used in the two books. What, then, explains the superiority of The Country of the Pointed Firs? In Deephaven Miss Jewett used pastoral materials clumsily; in The Country of the Pointed Firs the writer is a master artist who has learned the effectiveness of subtlety in portraying pastoral themes.

Deephaven emphasizes a particular place and a particular people to the virtual exclusion of dramatic action. Embracing the chief pastoral technique, the author's point of view is that of a city person looking

with fresh eyes at country people and country places. What the narrator sees in the country is spoken of in relation to its city counterpart, thus providing for a continuous city-country dialogue. This continuous reference to the city-country dialogue structures Deephaven.

Deephaven offers little in the way of a developed story. Two fashionable Boston girls, Kate Lancaster and Helen Denis, decide to spend the summer in the home of Katherine Brandon, Kate's deceased grandaunt. The home, modeled on the Jewett house in Berwick, is located in the seacoast community of Deephaven. Kate Lancaster sets the tone of the girls' adventure by evoking a pastoral contrast; she realizes that spending a complete summer in Deephaven might be dull for the young lady of means from Boston, but Kate insists that she and Helen are not ordinary Boston ladies and that there is no danger of their becoming bored.

Though some of Sarah Orne Jewett's characters are unique, the writer's main technique is to draw characters who are representative of a whole class. Thus a character, such as Mrs. Kew, is the self-reliant woman; the Widow Jim is the town gossip; and Mrs. Carew serves as a model for that high-styled country lady whose taste is unquestioned. Then there are the old sea captains who have been washed ashore for the last time. These characters or types appear in all four of Sarah Orne Jewett's novels about

rural life. This method of characterization allows the author to attribute a quality to the typical country person simply by attributing it to one of her recurring types. Mrs. Kew, the self-reliant woman, keeps the Deephaven lighthouse and a husband. By insisting on her cleverness--"Her comparisons were most striking and amusing, and her comments upon the books she read . . . were very shrewd and clever" (Deephaven, p. 20)--the narrator implies that all country people are clever.

A chief problem for the pastoralist is that of making his little world believable. The rural world has to serve as a metaphor for the greater urban world, and as such it has to be credible. Yet the small world must not give up its charm for the sake of a greater reality, for it is because of its charm that the sophisticate is sometimes willing to forsake the city, and this, after all, is one of the pastoralist's goals.

One way of establishing significance is to show that the country possesses its share of Hamlets and Lears and Juliets. These representative types are needed to provide linkage to the great outer world. One such transitional figure is Kate's grandaunt, Miss Katherine Brandon. On the surface she appears to have led a quiet, uneventful life; and Kate had always rather pitied her for never having experienced the grand passion which leads to marriage. Rummaging through an old attic trunk one

morning, Kate and Helen find a fading, yellow packet of letters which tell a sorrowful story of two star-crossed lovers. These letters were written to Katherine Brandon by a boyish Frenchman, a sailor who came to Deephaven in the days before the embargo. They met and fell in love, but his ship sailed before their plans to marry could be carried through. He wrote frequently, as did she. Then his letters stopped. Later she learned that he was lost at sea. "And I thought her the most matter-of-fact old lady," exclaims Kate, "yet here's her romance after all" (Deephaven, p. 34). Mourning for her dead lover and remaining faithful to his memory, Katherine Brandon never married, indicating in this way the seriousness of great experiences in the rural world.

Owing to a scarcity of economic opportunities, few young people stayed in Deephaven. So Helen and Kate spent their summer visiting and receiving old people, and it is necessarily through the old people that our idea of Deephaven materializes. Painting a picture of past glory and pride, the old serve as guardians of the past. They sadly admit Deephaven's present insignificance, but they have happy recollections of busy wharves and interesting foreign vessels in Deephaven's harbor. Now a sandbar, symbolically isolating Deephaven from the rest of the world, is steadily filling in the mouth of the harbor. The year 1807 marks Deephaven's decline and functions

much as B.C. and A.D. do for the outside world. This was the date of "Jefferson's folly," or the year when "Deephaven was ruined by the embargo" (Deephaven, p. 82). Thus, a recurring character in Miss Jewett's books is the once-wealthy, high-minded person whose family was ruined by the embargo. Sally Chauncey, sole survivor of an aristocratic, genteel Deephaven family ruined by "Jefferson's folly," is eighty years old and insane. Unable to withstand the destruction of her family, she can live only the life she knew before the embargo.

Captain Sands speaks for those who lived through the embargo: "Folks got tired of it, and it was dreadful hard times--ships rotting at the wharves; and Deephaven never was quite the same afterward" (Deephaven, p. 194). Revealing Deephaven society's satisfaction with itself despite the embargo, Miss Honora Carew, a member of a family that can still afford to practice high-minded charity, announces that "if anyone has the low taste to prefer a more active life, he is obliged to go elsewhere in search of it, and is spoken of afterwards with kind pity" (Deephaven, p. 82).

The mills multiplying so rapidly in New England in the second half of the nineteenth century were symbols of change, and the old families, whose wealth and prestige rested in the shipping industry, naturally resented them. Their repugnance for mills is clearly expressed on numerous

occasions. A neighboring town, Denby, grew up around some mills and is looked upon with condescension by Deephaveners with all the pride of the traditional over against the new and brassy. Helen speaks for the whole Deephaven community when she says:

I don't dispute the usefulness of a new bustling manufacturing town with its progressive ideas; but there is a simple dignity in a town like Deephaven as if it tried to be loyal to the traditions of its ancestors. (Deephaven, p. 292)

Criticism of the symbols of modernity and praise of a glorious past are characteristic of the pastoral. Coupled with this reaction against manufacturing towns is the praise of nature and rustic's place in the scheme of things. In a direct statement to the reader, Deephaven's narrator expresses pastoral sentiments about man's relation to nature:

The [country people] live so much nearer to nature than people who are in cities, and there is often a soberness about country people that one cannot help noticing. I wonder if they are unconsciously awed by the strength and purpose in the world about them, and in the mysterious power which is at work within them on their familiar farms. In their simple lives they take their instincts for truths, and perhaps they are not always so far wrong as we imagine. Because they are so instinctive . . . they may hear her [Nature's] voices when wiser ears are deaf. They have much in common after all, with the plants which grow up out of the ground and the wild creatures which depend upon their instincts wholly. (Deephaven, p. 224)

It is this impression, at once Rousseauist and

idyllic, with which Deephaven leaves us.

Miss Jewett's second book, A Country Doctor (1884), gives us more of what we have come to expect in a novel. The problem of becoming a woman doctor in the early nineteenth century is dramatized. The main focus of interest is Nan Prince, an orphan taken into the village doctor's home. Her decisions--whether to go to school or to make the rounds with Dr. Leslie, whether to stay in Oldfields or to move to the city and live with her aunt, and finally, whether to fulfill her lifelong ambition to become a doctor or to marry George Gerry and live a conventional city life--provide the materials of conflict in A Country Doctor. The reader's task is to understand why Nan makes the decision she does. As we learn her motives, we also begin to understand her country-oriented point of view.

Running through A Country Doctor are two pastoral themes which help to clarify what happens. First is natural man's superiority over his sophisticated city cousins, and second is the city-country contrast. Nan Prince is the spokesman for the myth of the country. Through her the implications of the myth come to the surface. She loves the country and country people, but neither trusts the city nor feels comfortable there. The fisher-farmer folk live close to nature and have a full understanding of the primary cycle of existence. These

ageless children of the land retain their innocence into old age because they have not been tainted by the city. The narrator suggests that Nan's mother was destroyed by the city, that her innocent and carefree rural upbringing in no way prepared her to cope with city life.

To understand Nan Prince, one must know of and sympathize with her love of the past and her love of the country. She is the focal point of the fundamental pastoral contrast between the city and the country, the new and the old, and is the prize in a tugging war between her urban aunt and the country doctor who has taken her into his home.

Wealthy, dignified, and charming, Miss Anna Prince wants Nan to lead a conventional life. Her allies are enticing--a group of laughing young people, among whom is George Gerry, a rising lawyer in the city of Dunport, who falls in love with Nan. A high place in Dunport society and a seemingly ideal marriage are Nan's for the taking. Opposed to Aunt Anna is Doctor Leslie, famous among farmer-patients and Boston peers for his knowledge and practice of medicine and for his noble bearing and selfless behavior among men. Opposed to Dunport is Oldfields, the place Nan loves for its associations. Her grandmother's old deserted home, to which Nan retreats when troubled, and the graveyard where her mother lies buried, are places by which she establishes her own identity. Opposed to George Gerry and marriage is Nan's

ambition to become a doctor so that she may help the people of Oldfields.

When Nan visits Dunport, her aunt introduces her into an exciting round of activities; however, the country girl instinctively feels alien to this new way of life. "The past seemed so secure and pleasant, as she looked back, and now she was in the power of a fateful future which had begun with something like a whirlwind."¹ Although Nan wins new friends in Dunport, she finds no contentment there. She intuitively knows that there are some basic differences between the town and the village, and while she participates in Dunport's social life she is at the same time skeptical of it. "What did these new town acquaintances know of the strawberries which grow in the bit of the meadow, or of the great high-bush blackberries by one of the pasture walls?" (Country Doctor, p. 83)

As narrator, Miss Jewett prejudices the aunt's case with remarks calculated to show the superiority of the country over the city:

The towns which are built in a hurry can be left in a hurry without a bit of regret, and if it is the fate . . . of the elder villages to find themselves the foundation upon which manufacturing communities rear their thinly built houses and workshops, and their quickly disintegrating communities of people, the

¹Sarah Orne Jewett, A Country Doctor (Boston, 1884), p. 80.

weaknesses of these are more glaring and hopeless in the contrast. (Country Doctor, p. 120)

That Nan sympathizes with this attitude is clearly evident, for she had been "suffering not a little," our narrator adds, "from her long-continued city life" (Country Doctor, p. 216). Eventually Anna Prince fails in her bid to keep Nan in the city, and so does George Gerry in his bid to marry her. The attraction of Oldfields is too powerful. We are left with the narrator's description of Nan's vision of Oldfields:

The ancient seaport had gathered for itself quaint names and treasures; it was pleased with its old fashions and noble memories; its ancient bells had not lost their sweet voices, and a flavor of the past pervaded everything."
(Country Doctor, p. 227)

In A Marsh Island the relationship between man and nature is treated with as much energy as the romance between Doris Owen and her two suitors, the sophisticated Dick Dale and the rustic Dan Lester. Miss Jewett's technique is more pictorial than before, as she lavishes her rhetoric on scenes of nature. The picturesque quality of the island, with its fog and mist lying low over lush vegetation divided by ancient trees, contributes to an air of unreality in A Marsh Island which encourages a dream-like atmosphere. The reader senses that the magic of the place will ensure a happy ending for the marsh islanders. Israel Owen and his daughter Doris are human extensions of their environment.

They are at one with nature. The island has shaped old Israel Owen, and his unruffled nature, reflecting inner peace and certainty is enviable. "The gentle old farmer, with his flock and herds and his love for his lands, was a charming example of the repose and peace to be gained from country life."²

Dick Dale enters the world of Marsh Island to paint unspoiled nature. The artist rents a room in the Owens' farmhouse. The house and its occupants are a revelation to the city artist, and he begins at once to see differences between the city and the Marsh Island. Dick Dale's story is one of initiation; his teachers are Israel and Doris Owen. Doris has a natural dignity and charm which Dick Dale is surprised to find in so little-traveled a community. And, too, the way life is lived in the Owen home makes Dick "a trifle ashamed of his grasping worldliness . . ." (Marsh Island, p. 62).

The artist sees a connection between the Owen family and the Marsh Island itself (Marsh Island, p. 131). Dick Dale recognizes that the Owens are better than the average family, and he partly attributes this merit to their environment. That is, the family, their house and barns, apple orchards and wheat fields, share an attitude of dignified permanence with the Marsh Island. The Owens

²Sarah Orne Jewett, A Marsh Island (Boston, 1885), p. 109.

live in direct touch with nature and are molded accordingly. Like the animistic Marsh Island they live on, their characteristics are simplicity and generosity. The Marsh Islanders, too, realize their affinity to nature. "The whole family liked to have their country appear its best, and had constantly apologized to Dick for any defect in the weather" (Marsh Island, p. 131). To the rustic a defect in his environment is felt to be a defect in himself. The interaction of men and nature is further suggested when "Doris [walks] lightly among the company of trees and presently her drooped head was also lifted up, as if the kind sun had drawn and straightened it" (Marsh Island, p. 176).

The suggestion that a particular rustic may be of noble birth rests easily in the pastoral, and Miss Jewett includes this motif in her description of the Owen family. The old people of the island sometimes speak of the old colonial days when the Owen family was considered to be one of the best families in what is now called Maine (Marsh Island, p. 112). The suggestion of nobility is strengthened when they indignantly refuse money offered in payment for common country courtesy by the aristocratic Lady Wincester, Dick Dale's wealthy aunt. Later the Lady Wincester tells Dick of the reaction to her offer: "She was very indignant because I offered her some money. I suppose it was rude of me, but one gets so used to that

way of expressing gratitude in this mercenary world" (Marsh Island, p. 227).

Dick Dale's summer with the Owen family ends when Doris accepts the blacksmith, Dan Lester, as her husband. Although rejected by Doris, the artist is determined to be a more serious person, for he has "gained a new respect for his own life and its possible value" (Marsh Island, p. 290). Marsh Island and its inhabitants are unchanged, but the city visitor has been improved by living in their little world. It is to Dick's city friend, Bradish, that he speaks his gratitude for his summer experiences:

I like everyone of them at the Island. If I ever amount to anything I shall thank those sincere, simple people for setting me the example of following my duty and working hard and steadily. . . . I never was so happy in my life as I was there. . . . You have to be put into an honest place like that to know how tired and sick I am of the kind of life I have drifted into. (Marsh Island, p. 230)

And this is how A Marsh Island ends, with Dick Dale determined to be a better person and with the perpetuation of Marsh Islanders assured by the marriage of Doris Owen to Dan Lester. "To the end," says Cary, "A Marsh Island remains an idyll in the pastoral tradition--even to the stylized wooing."³

The criticism most frequently leveled at Miss Jewett's full-length work is that it lacks physical or psychological

³Richard Cary, Sarah Orne Jewett (New York, 1962), p. 142.

action. This is obviously true, but many Jewett readers will point out, as Charles Miner Thompson does, that "elaborate action" by country people would present "a distorted aspect of strenuous liveliness."⁴ Readers who seek swashbuckling adventure or vicarious love-making must look elsewhere. Tired of the rush of urban living, Jewett readers seek a far distant shore, an eagle's flight from fragmentation. John Greenleaf Whittier must have been a member of this group, for he wrote his friend Sarah that "when tired and worried I resort to thy books and find rest and refreshing."⁵

From a pastoral standpoint some criticism is justified. In Miss Jewett's minor novels too much is insisted upon; the writer presses too many theses, not realizing, perhaps, that the pastoral works better by suggestion or indirection. When ideas from Arcadia are implied or hidden beneath the quiet, uneventful round of everyday life, they are more persuasive than when openly proclaimed. Miss Jewett's direct statement of what has historically been implied shows self-doubt--that she has not been able to show what she finally must say. Pastoral sentiments are most effective when they seep into the

⁴Charles Miner Thompson, "The Art of Miss Jewett," The Atlantic Monthly, XCIV (October, 1904), 495.

⁵Samuel T. Pickard, Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier, II (Boston, 1895), 654.

sophisticate's mind. Unconscious acceptance is desirable. Bringing the question out into the open often prejudices the case against pastoral, for the effective pastoralist characteristically lulls the sophisticate into accepting his thesis. (This is the meaning, I believe, for William Empson's repeated use of the phrase "pastoral trick" in Some Versions of Pastoral.) The pastoral depends for its power on subtlety. The sophisticate is willing to be lulled into accepting the myth of country life because he is weary of the city. Although indirection is a commonplace in pastoral, Miss Jewett, who perhaps did not realize how fully she was operating within the confines of the genre, insisted on certain assumptions about the country when she should have implied them. That this weakness was mainly eradicated in The Country of the Pointed Firs is one of the reasons for its superiority. There is nothing abrasive about her thesis in The Country of the Pointed Firs. Written by an author who has acquired subtlety, it is presented smoothly, indirectly, and gracefully. Thus it is the impact of Miss Jewett's improved technique on essentially the same materials which makes us long to forsake our urbanity and join the society of Dunnet Landing.

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS:

CULMINATION OF PASTORAL ART

The Country of the Pointed Firs, the high-water mark of regional fiction in nineteenth-century America, represents the culmination of Sarah Orne Jewett's technique, for it is in this novel that the author demonstrates her skill in handling pastoral materials. This is fortunate for her artistic reputation, for it is the pastoral element in her work that has saved her from the fate of the local-color writers, in whose midst she wrote. Consciously writing to preserve a rapidly vanishing portion of American society, Sarah Orne Jewett was able, unlike many of her lesser contemporaries, to see beyond the mannerisms and peculiarities of the region. She saw and represented in her work a continuation of mankind's long story in local customs and legends. She projected a representation of man himself caught for a moment in the amusing or tragic lives of the local characters.

As I have noted, the first condition of the pastoral is the existence of a sharp distinction between the complex urban life and the idyllic, peaceful country life. "One must realize," E. K. Chambers points out, "that the pastoral

is not the poetry of country life, but the poetry of the townsman's dream of country life."¹ The structuring of The Country of the Pointed Firs around the narrator serves to emphasize this condition. Indeed, the induction of the narrator from town into the realization of this dream, the isolated village of Dunnet Landing, is the major theme of the novel. The narrator comes to Dunnet Landing as if coming home to a place with "all that mixture of remoteness, and childish certainty of being the centre of civilization of which her affectionate dream had told."² Unlike her counterparts in the local-color story, she serves as more than a reporter of quaint native customs and a norm to guide the amused or sentimentally sympathetic reader. A townswoman, at first occasionally playing the role of sophisticate and condescending to her new friends, as she does, for example, when she tells Mrs. Todd that she can no longer afford the pleasure of "seeing folks" (Country, p. 8), she more often acts the part of an apprentice; and an infrequent, casual mention of her own middle age always comes as a shock after we have seen her childlike relationship to the people of the aging village.

¹E. K. Chambers, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Some Collected Studies (New York, 1965), p. 171.

²I am using the only edition incorporating all the Pointed Firs sketches. Sarah Orne Jewett, The Country of the Pointed Firs, in The World of Dunnet Landing, ed. David Bonnell Green (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1962), p. 2. Hereinafter referred to as Country.

The theme of a simple society acting as a metaphor for a more complex one is maintained throughout The Country of the Pointed Firs by a series of contrasts. The main contrast is between the world of Dunnet Landing and Boston. But Dunnet Landing also has its smaller counterpart in Green Island. And even on Green Island the pennyroyal patch is spoken of as still another world. We are constantly prodded by the mention of these various worlds to think in terms of simple-complex contrasts until this way of considering the action of The Country of the Pointed Firs becomes our habitual framework.

Oliver Wendell Holmes tells us that in the latter part of the nineteenth century Boston was the hub of the universe. Dunnet Landing has no such high aspirations. It is primarily a delightful little place where people are less hurried, less cynical, and less sophisticated than their cosmopolitan Boston brothers. The fisher-farmer folk are for the most part happy and contented, notwithstanding their complaint that life is not so complete as it once was when Dunnet Landing was a thriving ship-building community.

Even that complaint is unheard on Green Island. The home of Mrs. Blackett is the epitome of the pastoral ideal. The essence of the island and of the pastoral is contentment, and Mrs. Blackett and her son William seldom let pass an opportunity to insist upon their

happiness, "both winter and summer" (Country, p. 81). Their joys seem especially simple, perhaps even naive, when they are compared to the entertainments of an industrial society. Sunday night tea, for example, takes on a holiday atmosphere merely by using Mrs. Blackett's best china cups:

You'd laugh to see how we enjoy 'em. Sunday nights in winter: we have a real company tea 'stead 'o livin' right along just the same, an' I make somethin' good for a s'prise an' put on some o' my preserves, an' we get a-talkin' together an' have real pleasant times. (Country, p. 80)

The character of the people and the island compels the narrator to express a wish "to stay on forever at Green Island" (Country, p. 87).

The theme and story line of the novel are built around three rites--death, reunion, and marriage--presented in the beginning, middle, and end of the work. The many characters appearing between these scenes add with their simple lives new notes to these three major chords and contribute to the narrator's growing understanding of the wisdom, endurance, strength, and love possible in the setting of the simple village.

The book opens with a walking funeral for Mrs. Begg, one of the older inhabitants "who had professed great dissatisfaction with town life" (Country, p. 15). Although the narrator attends the funeral in her Sunday dress, she is excluded from the villagers' grief and does not "really

belong to Dunnet Landing." Instead of joining the funeral procession, she goes to the schoolroom she has rented for the summer in which to write her novel, and there unseen, apart, she watches the procession go by. In her description of this ritual, as in the two to follow it, there is a carefully maintained suggestion of endurance, of a pattern reappearing yet once again in the fabric of history.

"The little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge of the rocky shore" (Country, p. 18). The group seems more like a tableau set against an ageless landscape than a dramatic incident in a particular region. She refers to the walking funeral four times as a procession--a solemn one which disappears, as she watches, from the great landscape. "The funeral procession . . . crept around a shoulder of the slope . . . and disappeared from the great landscape as if it had gone into a cave" (Country, p. 18). Mrs. Begg's funeral is elevated, is made more meaningful, through its similarities with the funerals lamented by the classical and Christian pastoralists. Used by Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, Virgil, Radbertus, and John Milton, the "pathetic fallacy" and the consolation are two thoroughly conventional aspects of the pastoral elegy. Jewett touches both conventions in her description of Mrs. Begg's funeral:

It was a glorious day early in July with a clear, high sky; there were no clouds, there was no

noise of the sea. The song sparrows sang and sang, as if with joyous knowledge of immortality. (Country, p. 18)

Hyatt Waggoner has written that Miss Jewett was attempting to demonstrate that in Dunnet Landing, "where life is lived under simplified conditions, the permanent human situation may be discovered and the abiding human values discerned."³ I believe that this condition obtains throughout the work. It is part of the theme.

In the second ritual, the heart of the book, the narrator attends the Bowden reunion, not as a member of the family, of course, but almost as an adopted one since "it seemed to be enough for anyone to have arrived by the same conveyance as Mrs. Blackett" (Country, p. 161). After an exchange of greetings during which Mrs. Blackett is treated royally, the more formal part of the ritual begins. A hush unaccountably comes over the crowd of people. They are ranged in columns four abreast, a long procession headed by a few very important persons-- Mrs. Blackett and several ministers. The narrator has the vision to see beyond the rusticity of the occasion. Expressing a silent hope that she will be more and more like these people as she grows older, the narrator imagines:

We might have been a company of ancient Greeks going to celebrate a victory or to worship the

³Hyatt H. Waggoner, "The Unity of The Country of the Pointed Firs," in Green, p. 377.

god of harvest, in the grove above. It was strangely moving to see this and to make a part of it. The sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long; we were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress; we carried the tokens and inheritance of all such households from which this had descended, and were only the latest of our line. We possessed the instincts of a far, forgotten childhood; I found myself thinking that we ought to be carrying green branches and singing as we went.
(Country, p. 163)

Ritual, sacramental nature, continuity with the past--all are stressed in the above passage because of an important characteristic of the fisher-farmer folk. For them "clannishness is an instinct of the heart,--it is more than a birthright, or a custom; and lesser rights are forgotten in the claim to a common inheritance" (Country, p. 179).

Soon after this the narrator returns of necessity to the city but is vexed there by the hurry of life, the "constant putting aside of preference to yield to a most unsatisfactory activity" (Country, p. 329), and she begins to see the complexity and futile ingenuity of social life as a conspiracy against her. She turns again to Dunnet Landing:

. . . the first salt wind from the east, the first sight of a lighthouse set boldly on its outer rock, the flash of a gull, the waiting process of seaward-bound firs on an island, made me feel solid and definite again, instead of a poor, incoherent being. Life was resumed, and anxious living blew away as if it had not

been. I could not breathe deep enough or long enough. It was a return to happiness. (Country, p. 329)

Now completely aware of her feelings toward the village and its inhabitants, she participates in the third and final ritual, the marriage of William, Mrs. Blackett's son and Mrs. Todd's brother, to Esther, the shepherdess he has loved for almost fifty years. After a simple ceremony the couple come back to Mrs. Todd's house, smiling, rejuvenated, and with Esther holding a little lamb in her arms. The four of them take the cake and wine of the wedding feast together, "always in silence, like a true sacrament" (Country, p. 347). There is no question of the complete and accepted participation of the narrator, not as an outsider but as one of the true villagers. Although she must leave again, she takes with her the perceptions gained during her stay in Dunnet Landing. Just before the marriage ceremony, she writes:

I believed that I had never found love in its simplicity as I had found it at Dunnet Landing in the various hearts of Mrs. Blackett and Mrs. Todd and William. It is only because one came to know them, these three loving and wise and true, in their own habitation. Their counterparts are in every village in the world, thank heaven, and the gift to one's life is only in its discernment. I had only lived in Dunnet Landing until the usual distractions and artifices of the world were no longer in control, and I saw these simple natures clear. (Country, p. 337)

William and Esther's simple and strong marriage

culminates a series of related love affairs, all combining elements of happiness and sadness in a verisimilitude rare in love stories of the local-color period. It is in these affairs that Miss Jewett as a writer most often develops another element common to the pastoral--melancholy. Joanna's unfaithful sweetheart causes her to revile God and, in humiliation, to isolate herself on the deserted Shell Island. Mr. Tilley's lament is for "poor dear," his wife whose death eight years before cannot make her seem farther than a room away. Even Mrs. Todd's life conceals an unhappy love made impossible by artificial class concepts of men. When young, she loved and was loved by a boy who was above being a seafaring man. The boy's mother was against the match and broke it up, but the mother couldn't stop Mrs. Todd's feelings:

He's forgot our youthful feelin's, I expect,
but a woman's heart is different; them feelin's
comes back when you think you've done with 'em,
as sure as spring comes with the year. (Country,
p. 10)

Miss Jewett, in these stories, has escaped the dangers of sentimentality by the use of skillful writing and an emphasis not on the quaintness of the suffering character but on what Chambers, in his definition of pastoral melancholy, speaks of as "the primal tragedies of existence, the burden of labour and the pang of loss,

[which] become, not less, but more affecting"⁴ because they are played in the simple setting of the pastoral.

The third element of the pastoral is also found in abundance in The Country of the Pointed Firs, and that is the assumption that natural man, the simple man, is purer than cultivated man and that there exists between him and nature a special sympathy. All four major characters of the novel--Mrs. Blackett, her children Mrs. Todd and William, and William's new wife Esther--are close to the land and the sea around it. In their own various ways, they have gained spiritually by the association. Esther, for example, is "untouched by the fret and fury of life; she had lived in sunshine and rain among her sheep and had been refined instead of coarsened" (Country, p. 246). They have acquired wisdom over the years, but this wisdom never overrides a quality Miss Jewett stresses for each of them--childlike simplicity. Mrs. Todd is referred to as a true child as often as she is an ageless sibyl. William, at sixty, is called an "untraveled boy" or an "ancient boy." Esther's eyes are always "childlike." And at the marriage of these two, an even greater youth seems to come to them.

It is in Mrs. Todd, however, that all elements of the pastoral spirit come together. Nature gives up her

⁴Chambers, p. 174.

secrets to those who live in her bosom. Almira Todd, in constant communication with the past through her knowledge of ancient herbs, gains wisdom with age while maintaining a pristine innocence. This innocence has its roots in a relationship between man and nature that existed before the earth was jarred by our first parents:

There were some strange and pungent odors that roused a dim sense and remembrance of something in the forgotten past. Some of these might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites, and have had some occult knowledge handed with them down the centuries. . . . They were dispensed to suffering neighbors, who usually came at night as if by stealth, bringing their own ancient-looking vials to be filled. (Country, p. 4)

The pre-Fall relationship with nature that Mrs. Todd enjoys preeminently qualifies her to administer to the sicknesses of her neighbors, both of the body and of the soul.

It may not have been only the common ails of humanity with which she tried to cope; it seemed sometimes as if love and hate and jealousy and adverse winds at sea might also find their proper remedies among the curious wild-looking plants in Mrs. Todd's garden. (Country, p. 5)

That Mrs. Todd distributes the fruits of her ancient knowledge of plants to her neighbors and that she does indeed enjoy a special relationship with the forces of nature is made abundantly clear. Like Lycidas, she is the "Genius of the shore/. . . And shalt be good/To all that wander in that perilous flood."

Strong evidence of her special relationship is seen in her ability to command the cooperation of adverse winds at sea. On a trip to Green Island with the narrator Mrs. Todd, growing impatient to see her mother, "twitched the sheet as if she urged a horse. There came at once a fresh gust, and we seemed to have doubled our speed" (Country, p. 55). Later in the day on the return trip the wind, having learned its lesson, "served us all the way home, and did not fall or let the sail slaken until we were close to shore" (Country, p. 84). On another occasion when a boat was stuck, "the winds veered around . . . as if on purpose and helped with the sail; so presently the boat was free" (Country, p. 130).

Mrs. Todd represents the Landing and its simple life to the narrator, not only because she is the daughter of the wise, old Mrs. Blackett and the child of Green Island but also because she stands at the physical center of the Landing itself, dispensing her advice, knowledge, and herb cures for everybody. The narrator calls her wisdom "an intimation of truth itself," and it is Mrs. Todd who seems to lead the narrator along the gradual acceptance into village life. Perhaps it is her presence at the three rituals of this acceptance that gives them an atmosphere of historical continuance for her grief and wisdom are carefully related by the author to those of the "historic soul, ageless as an idyll of Theocritus."

There was something lonely and solitary about her great determined shape. She might have been Antigone alone on the Theban plain. It is not often given in a noisy world to come to the places of great grief and silence. An absolute, archaic grief possessed this countrywoman; she seemed like a renewal of some historic soul, with her sorrows and the remoteness of a daily life busied with rustic simplicities and the scents of primeval herbs. (Country, p. 78)

Life was very strong in her, as if some force of Nature were personified in this simple-hearted woman and gave her cousinship to the ancient dieties. She might have walked the primeval fields of Sicily; her strong gingham skirts might at that very moment bend the slender stalks of asphodel and be fragrant with trodden thyme, instead of the brown wind-brushed grass of New England and frostbitten goldenrod. She was a great soul, was Mrs. Todd, and I her humble follower. (Country, p. 309)

In the last scene of the novel she vanishes into the landscape, bending to pluck an herb, and the narrator reluctantly goes back into the complex world, but with the rejuvenation and enlightenment found in nature and the simple people by many an earlier pastoral poet.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

It remains for us to examine the relationship Sarah Orne Jewett enjoyed with her own time and place. How well are the dominant literary notions of the nineteenth century woven into her work? If one agrees that she wrote a kind of regional fiction, there is still the question as to the extent to which she corresponds to or deviates from other writers in this genre. Does she, for example, stress the differentiating aspects of her region to the detriment of its similarities? Or does she attract our attention with particulars so that she might discuss with us certain shared universals? Before considering Miss Jewett's relation to the Adamic debate which informs classic American literature in general and the nineteenth century in particular, let us first consider her place among the local colorists.

Local color occupies a respectable, if minor, position in American literature. Hamlin Garland describes local color as having "such a quality of texture and background that it could not have been written in any other place or by anyone else than a native."¹ Thus the

¹Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols (Boston, 1894), p. 54.

tourist, however talented, cannot write local-color stories. Closest to the pulse of the genre is the native writer who naturally and spontaneously presents the differentiating details of a community to the detriment of the similarities.²

Those characteristics of local color which lead toward realism (as the term is used in the phrase "the realistic novel") are accounted virtues; those which do not, weaknesses. The shortcomings³ are sentimental didacticism, labored histrionics, and structural deficiencies; the virtues are local coloring, use of dialect, and the exploitation of rural character and manners in the immediate or colonial past. Regionalists hoped to delineate life and character before the forces of change erased their memory of the way it was. The New England writers, for example, determined to define "the fast vanishing essence of Yankeeism."⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe said of Oldtown Folks (1869) that "it is my resumé of the whole spirit and body of New England."⁵

Our tendency to categorize literature and its creators rigidly has, in the case of Sarah Orne Jewett,

²Ibid.

³The shortcomings and the virtues are taken from Robert E. Spiller, et al., Literary History of the United States, II (New York, 1948), 844.

⁴Ibid., p. 843.

⁵Ibid., p. 844.

resulted in the obscuring of that which is most significant in her work. Categories rarely are capable of expressing what is essential about writers and their work; and this simplification, though sometimes a useful technique, seldom yields anything really valuable. This tendency ought to be resisted, and our attention should focus on the writer's point(s) of departure from convenient categories. The best regional fiction in New England after the war, was being written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rose Terry Cooke, and Annie Trumbull Slosson. Their work, considered the best representative of the local-color genre, suddenly became "dull and oldfashioned"⁶ in the light of Sarah Orne Jewett's first book, Deephaven (1877). According to Carlos Baker, Deephaven marks the beginning of "the most distinguished career among all the writers of regional fiction."⁷

The reason for Sarah Orne Jewett's superiority does not lie in her greater skill in delineating New England life and character. Her career is more distinguished than those of the regionalists because of her comprehensive vision. Compared to the world she portrays, theirs is small indeed. They draw incidents from a section of the country; Miss Jewett draws a world inhabited with characters and actions which fit naturally into it. We perceive

⁶Ibid., p. 845.

⁷Ibid.

immediately how little the designation "local colorist" helps us to understand Miss Jewett's most resonant tones. We also perceive how small a niche is available to the local colorist. The genre is highly constrictive. Miss Jewett deceptively emphasizes differences as the regionalists do, but her heaviest emphasis is on the common experiences of mankind. She exploits native character types not as an end but as a means to an end. Portraying country life as we in the concrete canyons imagine it permits her to deal with universal experience. No mere entertainer, Sarah Jewett took herself seriously, and she believed she had something worth telling others that would help them to live a more satisfying life. Infusing her world with pastoral assumptions, she hoped to justify the country to the city, and she did this by drawing a timeless, happy world that a more sophisticated society had outgrown.

The place Sarah Orne Jewett enjoys among the local colorists is enviable and comfortable, and it has persuaded most of her admirers to delve no deeper into her work; but it is to another tradition and milieu to which one must turn to penetrate the deeper dimensions of her art.

Articulate Americans of the nineteenth century were reluctant to shoulder the accumulated guilt of Europeans; thus they sought ways in which history and religion might be more favorably construed. It became necessary to cut ourselves off from the Old World and to interpret the New

so as to give a new impetus to man's creative spirit. To facilitate this, America was cut adrift and our literature was to reflect our separateness. No longer were our books to be derived from European models. Our literature was to be, in Lowell's words, "fresh and underivative."⁸ In this dictum lay a new beginning for our creative artists, a second chance for the Western world. Native writers portrayed the American as a new man, "sprung," like Gatsby, "from his own platonic conception of himself."⁹ Henry James even named one of his heroes new-man. The image of the American as Adam with a second chance to make something of the Creation was firmly established.

Adam was the first, the archetypal man. His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him. All this and more were contained in the image of the American as Adam.¹⁰

This notion sparked a century-long debate, the fruits of which we are still enjoying. The works that depend on this debate make up what we usually mean when we speak of the main stream of American literature. Cooper, Emerson,

⁸R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago, 1955), p. 78.

⁹Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, James, Twain, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Hemingway--the list could be expanded--all reflect the American experience with emphasis on the possibility of innocence. The innocent is our typical American hero,

. . . springing from nowhere, outside time, at home only in the presence of nature and God, who is thrust by circumstances into an actual world and an actual age. American fiction grew out of the attempt to chart the impacts which ensued, both upon Adam and upon the world he is thrust into. American fiction is the story begotten of the noble but illusory myth of the American as Adam.¹¹

The movement to slough off the sin-bound hide of the past was given direction by the Unitarians, who in the person of Henry Ware stressed "the natural goodness of man,"¹² and the Transcendentalists, who operated out of "the hopeful belief in the newness, the separateness, the self-sufficiency, the lack of moral involvement, and hence the innocence of the representative figure in the New World."¹³ The antithesis of this happy view of man was articulated by Jonathan Edwards, who defined man's nature as essentially sinful--a condition which had obtained since the Fall. Ware's view was given literary expression by Emerson and Thoreau and occasionally even

¹¹Ibid., p. 89.

¹³Ibid., p. 193.

¹²Ibid., p. 32.

by Herman Melville who believed that men, "like angels, can have direct perception of timeless essences."¹⁴ It is difficult to find a pure expression of Edward's pessimistic view of man in the nineteenth century. His viewpoint, however, undergirds much of our best fiction; for American writers, unable to subscribe fully to the former view and unwilling to endorse the latter, used both notions in a way that allowed them to juxtapose two discordant images of life--the way it should be and the way it most often is.

Nathaniel Hawthorne knew that men were not like angels--Emerson to the contrary and notwithstanding. Hawthorne characteristically presents the choice to his hero of either accepting the world as it is or flying from it. R. W. B. Lewis explains:

That is why we have the frantic shuttling in novel after novel, between the village and the forest, the city and the country; for these are the symbols between which the choice must be made and the means by which moral inference is converted into dramatic action"¹⁵

The extravagant imaginations of America's finest writers enabled them to use the American myth of innocence as if it were theirs alone. Other writers, perhaps intimidated by the great ones or perhaps simply lacking the synthesizing vision of a Hawthorne or Melville, wrote

¹⁴Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 113.

books that depended less directly on the Adamic myth. Baffled by the complexity and the rapid pace of change, they felt adrift and outside the mainstream of American life. The uprooting and damning of inherited institutions and traditional ways of thinking and acting had an unsettling effect on all but the most fervent exponents of hope. Too much movement and change, dissolution and disappearance, caused some Americans to cling tightly to the past. Francis Parkman, for example, turned to history, finding in it "a comfort to the temperament wearied by . . . civilization."¹⁶ Another writer apparently out of step with the great ideas of her time was Sarah Orne Jewett.

The direction in the second half of the century away from simplicity and rural life and toward industrial complexes engendered in Sarah Jewett a desire to preserve in her fiction as much of the past as would fit into a picture of life as it might be. A society was "remembered" that had the quality of a pre-Fall existence, and many of the inhabitants shared that same relationship with God, or Nature, that Adam shared with his Creator. In this fashion Sarah Jewett was able to keep the American in that state of innocence that he was supposed to enjoy in the New World.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 173.

In her own way Sarah Orne Jewett reflects the debate which has given shape and substance to American literature. The typically innocent American hero is marked for destruction in an evil world--not without having an effect on that world to be sure, but destroyed nevertheless. Intentionally preserving her heroes, Miss Jewett decided not to put them into industrial society after the Civil War. In her work we see the Adamic person "at home in the presence of nature and god, outside time," yet not thrust into the actual world. Through the pastoral genre Sarah Jewett is free to reflect on the metropolis, but the metropolis is not free to enter the country of the pointed firs. Still, we cannot understand her country or even adequately appreciate it without a knowledge of industrial America.

The newness of man's moral stance in the New World is actually an expression of a very old tradition, a pastoral relationship between man and Nature which has attracted such writers as Theocritus, Virgil, and John Milton. The New World pastoralist could not share the Transcendentalists' rejection of the past. To the pastoralist the present was the greatest danger--the industrial revolution that tore asunder the rural world by dotting it with factories and by building railroads, octopus-like, across it.

Sarah Orne Jewett returned in her fiction, therefore,

to a childlike world that was isolated from evil. Ostensibly, she lacked the imagination to do justice to the Adamic myth, yet we find in her work a vision of life as it might be juxtaposed through implication with a vision of life as it is actually lived. Miss Jewett was part of an old tradition that insisted on a set of assumptions about rural life that she had come by on her own. She found that she could give significance to the story of her sparsely populated region by informing it with a pastoral framework. And she found in her past the health, purity, and youthfulness that the Transcendentalists prescribed as the subject matter of American literature.

Thus it is Sarah Orne Jewett's theme--the pastoral myth of innocence--which accounts for her supremacy over the local colorists. And I suggest that this theme, which so closely resembles the Adamic myth of innocence, also entitles her to stand in the main stream of American literature.

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